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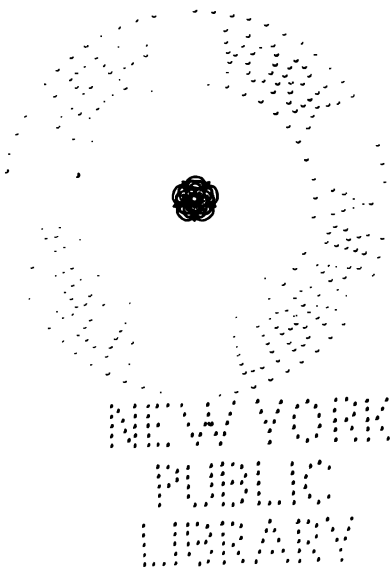

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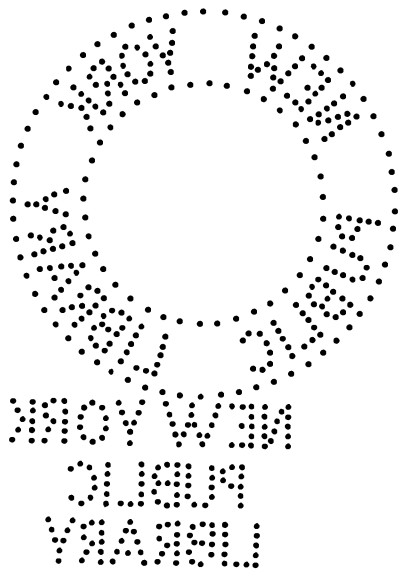

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THE MILLS OF THE GODS

I

HIS real name was Renzo Bellucci, but his intimates in Italy and elsewhere had called him Satanuccio ever since a certain wild escapade of his at the age of eighteen. This adventure, which consisted in his eloping with the three weeks' bride of the Sindic of Naples, fell later into the category of pardonable failings. For as the years went on Count Renzo Bellucci succeeded in building up a reputation for being the most lawless of a race old in lawlessness. Even his immediate forefathers had lived like predatory feudal barons in their remote palace in the Lombard Alps — riding rough-shod over the simple peasantry, and with an airy impunity

breaking every inconvenient law, social as well as moral. It was said of these Bellucci that if some outraged neighbor summoned courage for remonstrance and threatened to invoke "the Law," the Bellucci of the years gone by would smile and echo, "'The Law'? In the mountains of the Bellucci — I am the law." And the worst of it was that this had been no idle boast.

But times were changed. No one out of Italy seemed to know whether this present Count Bellucci had in his youth emulated his ancestors' deeds of actual violence, or whether he had merely carried to unusual lengths the more refined vices of his own time. Certain it was he had not set foot on his native soil for twenty years — it was whispered that he dared not.

This was perhaps small deprivation to a man who divided his time between Paris, Vienna, Monte Carlo, and two or three favored watering-places. But even the spending of a mysterious revenue with princely generosity, even laying waste the lives of sundry fair and noble ladies — came at last to pall on the Italian. It was borne in upon him that he had lived long enough in the mad whirl and — chill reminder! — there was a touch of frost on his temples. He could, of course, have disguised the fact, but he had too true an estimate of the greater distinction lent to his almost unpardonably perfect face by the grace of a little silver softening the blue-black of his hair. Still, although he knew that for the time being it lent him an even subtler fascination,

he accepted the warning and fell to thinking how he would spend his later years. He had always intended to marry — some day. The day had arrived . . . but the wife? Clearly she must not be one of the type he knew too well already. The laborious vivacity of the average smart woman was beginning to be to him a mortal weariness — another significant symptom! In any case, to marry one of them . . . He shuddered. It would be like marrying a brass band.

He was driving in the Engadine the following summer — not the first time, for he was a famous whip. But for this occasion Monsieur Binder of Paris had turned out a new and marvelous coach after Bellucci's own design. The luxurious inside, or, to speak by the

card, the insides, were a miracle of ingenious devices for supplying all the comforts of home. From without all the world might see the admirable proportions and perfect finish of this dark green miracle of elegance, with its touches of bright scarlet, its four gray horses with scarlet trappings, its liveried servants behind and jaunty groom on the box, with the long coach-horn shining like new gold and sending troops of triumphal echoes flying into the mountains. Certainly there was no gayer spectacle that summer in all the gay playground of Europe than Count Bellucci in Tyrolese-green, driving this flashing equipage along the blinding white roads of the Engadine.

He had stopped at Süs for *déjeuner*, and stood waiting for the horses at the

door of the Schweizerhof, finishing his cigarette and laughing idly at a passage-at-arms between the two ladies of his party who, at each turn, appealed to him — apparently for his opinion, in reality for a vast deal more. Suddenly, in a great cloud of dust, with a jingling of harness and bells, the diligence from Davos drove up to the door. Count Bellucci's attention wandered from his vivacious guests as he watched the usual sunburnt contingent climbing down with cramped eagerness to storm the café of the Schweizerhof. They were all as white as millers from the pervading dust — all but two. These ladies wore dust cloaks of silver-gray silk, white Panama hats and white lace veils. The cloaks and veils, removed in the hall, revealed two people guiltless

of travel stains, the handsome mother of a still more strangely beautiful girl. Girl? She might be twenty-six, mused Bellucci — but by all the gods, what a face!

With the instinct of his kind, he had not noticed the older woman particularly till she turned to say to her daughter, "Don't be so slow, child; all the tables will be taken." He stared, then contracted his black brows and after a second's hesitation went forward.

"How do you do? Do you remember me after all this time?"

The woman started slightly, then seemed from her deliberate look of well-bred coldness about to deny the acquaintance — reconsidered, and bowed without noticing his offered hand.

"You are clever to recognize me after so many years," she said. "Is this the way to the coffee-room?"

"No; permit me." He led the way. His gourmet guest, the Duc de Boutray, was still waiting and fuming at a far table for a final "special" dish that seemed never to be coming.

"Will you sit over there?"

"No," said the lady, looking about, "we will have a table to ourselves."

"But there is none."

"They will bring one."

Bellucci intercepted a breathless waitress with her hands full of dishes. "*Nein, nein,*" there were no more tables to be had, but there was plenty of room at the others. This way — she would show madame. The lady said a few low words to her. The girl opened her

eyes and agreed instantly that a small table should be brought from some other room. But the *Gnädige Frau* must have the kindness to wait a little. Oh, yes, she would wait. She leaned against the wall, observing covertly Bellucci's momentary silent absorption in her daughter. Never in all his commerce with beautiful women, never in all his days, had he seen a face that stirred him as this one did. The only things English about her were her figure and her serenity — "incredibly proud," he called it, others said supremely indifferent. For the rest, this daughter of a typical Englishwoman looked an Italian of the Italians save for her milk-white skin. The nobility of her outlines was purely Latin, he said to himself; the fine, clean curve of the

jaw that is rarest of all rare things in England, the delicate chiseling of lips and chin, and above all the eyes! Ah! said Bellucci to himself, those eyes look straight out of Italy. And an obscure sense of homesickness possessed him. But how — how had it happened? How —? . . . and behind his surface curiosity touching the mother ran deep and eager the thought, "How might I make those lamps of Italy to shine on me?"

"Don't let us keep you," said the elder woman drily.

"I must wait and see you established. Your daughter?"

"Oh, quite unnecessary for you to wait." She looked about as if in search of something.

"But it will be a pleasure," replied

Bellucci suavely. "Won't you present me to your daughter?"

"I thought so — they are smoking in here!" exclaimed the lady. "I will see if we cannot get a private room."

Her roving eyes settled upon her daughter with a straight, keen look that gave the impression of accompanying a command. The girl turned away, walked to the window and stood looking out.

"A private room is impossible," said Bellucci. "I tried my best to get one. The place is overflowing."

"Ah!" the mother leaned back once more against the wall. Bellucci forced himself to look away from the girl, and, directing the most gravely sweet of all his arsenal of dangerous glances upon

the woman at his side, he said under his breath.

"To think of our meeting like this!"

"To think of our meeting at all!" she replied with a quietness that seemed bought at a price.

"Why do you say that? I have always hoped . . . I have never felt that the past was dead."

"That consolation has also been denied to me."

"How bitter women are over the chances of life."

"To-day I am not bitter."

"No?"

"No. Bitterness is impotence."

"And to-day you . . . you . . ." he scrutinized her narrowly.

"To-day I remember. That swallows up mere bitterness."

He bowed slightly with a tinge of mockery.

"You perplex me a little, just as you used to. But your good memory is a compliment to the — our past."

The woman set her thin lips in a hard line.

A little table was being carried in by the obliging waitress, and the lady after nodding her approval across the room to the sturdy *Mädchen*, turned to Bellucci.

"Good-by," she said.

"I shall see you again."

"Scarcely; you go as usual to St. Moritz?"

"Oh! I go where I like at the moment. I never make plans. And you —?"

"I . . . oh, I go to luncheon." She moved away. He kept at her side.

"I don't even know your name."

She flashed a look at him over her shoulder, and quite low she said:

"But I know yours, Satanuccio. Good-by."

He turned a dull red, as if she had struck him across the face, and he went down the long dining-room with anger-lit eyes. It did not escape him that she waited until he reached the door before calling her daughter to rejoin her.

After a talk outside with the driver of the diligence, Bellucci announced to his guests that he had just been hearing that the weather at St. Moritz was atrocious. Why not go to Tarasp for a few days? It would prolong their outing a little, but . . . As usual he encountered no opposition to his plans.

That same evening, making his way

along the veranda that runs around two sides of the Waldhaus at Tarasp, he scanned with eager eyes the people dining at the double row of tables. In vain the head waiter kept bowing at his elbow, saying that he had reserved a special table inside for Monsieur le Comte, "by the window with the finest view." The look of anxious scrutiny in Bellucci's face suddenly cleared as he caught sight of two ladies at the far end of the Galerie du Nord.

"*Inside!*" he turned suddenly upon the waiter. "You don't suppose I dine at the table d'hôte!"

"There is a special dining-room, Monsieur le Comte, for dining apart."

But Bellucci was deaf — all his being seemed to be concentrated in the gleaming eyes as he made his way to an empty

table, next but one to the ladies he was looking for. He was sure the elder one saw him, for she had turned round as he approached. Whether she had been magnetized by the insistence of his glance, or whether making the motion merely by chance, she gave no further sign of recognition. The waiter was still murmuring obsequiously when the Italian cut him short:

"Don't you know that people come to Vulpera for the air? We will dine out here." He stopped by an empty table.

"But, Monsieur le Comte — "

"Bring me the menu."

"But that table is taken, monsieur."

"I know, *I* have taken it." Wine-list!" A little Frenchwoman bustling past, stopped to greet Bellucci.

"Fancy meeting people one knows in this out-of-the way place. I've just caught sight of Madame Paravicini." She bustled on and greeted with effusion the travelers from Davos. Bellucci made as if only that moment had he recognized the neighbor with her back to him.

He rose and followed the Frenchwoman. "How do you do again, Madame Paravicini?" he said. "Mademoiselle," he bowed.

The girl was dressed in white and wore no ornament but a long chain wrought to look like a thin golden rope, from which hung a somewhat insignificant "St. George and the Dragon" in enamel. Delicate as was the workmanship of the chain, it was too heavy for such a pendant.

The stream of talk ran so swiftly between the two elder women that Bellucci was at leisure to stand and look at the girl. So far from blushing or even averting her eyes, she seemed unconscious of his fascinated scrutiny. Calmly as any saint looks out of a chapel window she gazed across the wooded valley of the inn, toward the high-perched hamlet of Fettan.

Presently the voluble flow paused an instant.

"And this is your daughter!" exclaimed Madame la Baronne Sauvan. "I am delighted to see you at last!" and with a Frenchwoman's tact she covered the girl's lack of response by taking her passive hand and pressing it warmly. "I am so glad to see you coming out of your seclusion. A young

girl and — may I say? — one so beautiful, ought not to live the life of a *religieuse*," she nodded and smiled. "After dinner!" she added by way of adieu, and Bellucci walked back with her to her table.

"I understand," she whispered, "that people say in London Madame Paravicini staves off the rivalry of a beautiful daughter longer than any woman ever did before. That girl is twenty-six or twenty-seven. But I don't understand it myself. Madame Paravicini has lived mostly in the country since her husband died. You know she's fabulously rich. But it's quite true that exquisite girl has never had a London season. Some women are so selfish."

"Who was Paravicini — one of the Genoese?"

"Yes, younger branch. He wasn't much. Everybody wondered why she married him. But he was very good-looking — your type." And she laughed coquettishly up into the dark face. Bellucci bowed and went back to his own party, just assembled. He was vaguely annoyed at their immediate discovery of, and comment upon, his friends from Davos. He had roused the curiosity of his guests at Süs by refusing to say who the ladies were, and he damned his evil luck in not having earlier known their name. He supplied the omission now carelessly enough, but it was too late. For his friends his unusual reticence, as they thought it, had cast a cloak of mystery about the two women. All through dinner the talk ran upon the girl. She was the most flawless beauty of the age, the

Duc de Boutray declared, and why was it that all the world wasn't raving about her? Bellucci observed with pleasure that although every one in that particular corner of the world was staring and speculating, the girl's own eyes left the table before her only to rest, with serenity unparalleled, on the far-off white tower of the Convent of Fettan.

"They have never spoken to each other all through dinner," whispered the Duc de Boutray, as the two ladies rose. Without looking right or left they made their way indoors.

Neither Madame la Baronne nor anyone else saw the Paravicinis after dinner.

"And they never once spoke to each other," was the remark of more than one.

II

For four days Madame Paravicini had successfully foiled all attempts at friendliness on the part of her acquaintances. Although both she and her daughter drank the waters, they did not join the fashionable horde down at the Trinkhalle of the Kurhaus in the early morning. They had the waters brought up to them, and walked about the deserted Waldhaus grounds, "between glasses."

On the fourth day one of the curious, who stayed behind to observe, reported that they threaded their way up and down the deserted paths in a silence so absolute that it bordered on the uncanny. People began to whisper, "The girl is deaf and dumb!" When the rumor reached Bellucci he turned white; his circumspection suddenly failed him.

He had driven his party that day round by Ardetz and Guarda to Fettan. When, almost home again his keen eyes caught sight of Madame Paravicini and her daughter returning from a walk. As they reached the door of the Waldhaus Madame Paravicini turned suddenly, hearing the sound of the coach-horn. Bellucci brought his four superb horses up with a magnificent sweep and flourish, stopping them suddenly on their very haunches precisely at the door of the great entrance. The girl gazed at the brilliant apparition with large-eyed wonder.

"Come," said Madame Paravicini. Her daughter seemed not to hear. But Bellucci noticed with secret satisfaction, as he jumped off the box, the first sign of interest the marvelous face had worn.

It was true she looked not at the driver, but at the foam-flecked mouths of the horses, and the long scarlet tassels, that waved so proudly down their splendid chests.

"Come, Alicia," repeated Madame Paravicini, and still the girl never moved. An acquaintance of Bellucci, who left the group at the door to compliment the driver on his horsemanship, whispered the growing impression.

"Think of that superb creature there being deaf and dumb!"

Bellucci looked up sharply. Madame Paravicini had laid her hand on the girl's arm, and was drawing her indoors. A lady's glove lay on the step. Bellucci sprang after them just as they entered the hall.

"You dropped this, mademoiselle,"

he said close to the girl's ear. She turned at once and slowly shook her head.

Bellucci watched them till they disappeared up the broad staircase.

"Of course she's *not* deaf!" he said triumphantly.

"Did she answer you?"

"No, but couldn't you see she heard me? — and I spoke low."

By dinner-time another theory was generally accepted. The beautiful *Anglaise* had some fatal and hideous impediment in her speech. Bellucci's heart sank again. How could he be sure the rest were wrong? There *was* something strange about those long dinners, and those longer walks, unbroken, so far as any one could tell, by a single syllable of speech — it was more than

strange, it was inhuman. Why did the mother not talk to her in signs? Was she so proud, or was the girl — that she preferred to accept dumbly the fiat of fate and wrap herself in silence? But it wasn't true. He threw off the supposition like an evil dream. For he had recognized by this time that the girl meant something to him of allurement — promised something (aside from being the daughter of an enemy) — something of mysterious difficulty in attainment new even in his varied history.

He fastened his gaze on her that night at dinner, wondering, beseeching, imperious. Presently, to his joy and astonishment, she turned her great liquid eyes full upon him, seemed to shiver slightly in the cool evening air,

and drew a little white lace mantle round her. He turned away an instant to disguise his triumph. When he looked again the great eyes were still upon him. A fresh course was being served at the moment. Madame Paravicini leaned forward and whispered something. The girl, without opening her lips, got up and changed seats with her mother. Her back was turned on Bellucci's party, so that instead of a new love's mysterious beauty Madame Paravicini's cold but open scorn confronted her ancient enemy.

Bellucci shook himself free of his friends about nine o'clock that night. He scribbled a few words on a card, sent it up to Madame Paravicini's sitting-room, and waited over half an hour thereafter, fearing and fuming in

his own apartments. At last a verbal message:

"Madame Paravicini is tired, but she will see you for a few minutes."

He found her alone, half reclining on a *chaise longue* in the loggia opening out of her sitting-room. She did not rise, she did not notice his hand.

"Sit down," she said.

For the first time in his life Bellucci fell upon silence. At last, he began desperately, with something like a shake in his voice:

"Sophie . . . Madame Paravicini, I've come to ask you, to *beg* you to be friends."

She might have been dead, for all response.

"Or, if not friends just yet, at least treat me like an acquaintance — like, devil take it! like a human being!"

She made a slight movement where she lay in the shadow.

"Your demands are at least more moderate than they used to be, Satanuccio. It is so with us all as we grow old."

He disregarded the sneer.

"You agree then . . . you will let me see something of you?"

"Of *me?*"

"Yes, of you . . . and of your daughter," he said with the genius of audacity.

"You make a strange request."

"Why? See, I am frank. Your daughter is young, she is strangely beautiful, but she is wholly under your dominion. What have you to fear? Even I recognize in her something — something —." He leaned forward out

of the light from the inner room, trying to pierce the gloom shrouding the woman in the corner of the loggia.

"For the moment I was thinking of myself — odd as it may seem."

"N-not at all," he stammered.

"Such a request addressed from you to me is surely 'strange,' as I said, and — even for you, Satanuccio, it strikes me as —"

"Well, as what?"

"As daring."

He moved uneasily in his chair.

"Don't you know," she went on in a low, even voice, "that I am that woman in the world who most owes you hatred?"

"No!"

"Oh, yes . . . and there are not a few of us about the world."

He was breaking in upon her challenge, but she silenced him.

"Remember," and a white hand was lifted in shadowy warning out of the dim corner, "remember I owe you more than all."

For the second time in her presence he, the adroit, the voluble, was stricken with silence.

"I have been sitting here," she went on, "thinking about you for half an hour," — she laughed a little laugh of self-scorn — "for half my life might be nearer the mark; but in this half-hour here, I have decided to let you renew the old acquaintance . . . " she paused an instant . . . "if you dare."

He smiled to himself over the incorrigible vanity, the pathetic constancy of woman. For all his audacious frank-

ness, she still thought of herself as "dangerous." He sneered covertly:

"I accept the risk in all humility."

"Then go now," she said, "and you may dine with us here, if you will, tomorrow. We shall not go down to the veranda again. The evenings are growing cold."

Punctually at eight the next evening Bellucci presented himself at the door of Madame Paravicini's sitting-room. He found her and her daughter looking over some views. They were in evening dress for the first time since coming to the Waldhaus, and even the mother looked brilliant. The girl — he caught his breath as he looked at the girl! The dazzling whiteness of her neck and arms was set off by a ravish-

ing gown of coral tulle. In the masses of her hair two of the great rich carnations of the Engadine shone and glowed. She bowed gravely upon the introduction, and Bellucci's dread revived as he noticed that the beautiful, firm curve of her lips never once relaxed for the utterance of word or even sound. The conversation during dinner went on a little lamely between him and his hostess. Bellucci's spirits sank lower every time that the girl, or pointed inclusion of her in some question raised, replied by a little nod, or a smiling shake of the beautiful head, instead of a yea or a nay. She had an Italian expressiveness of gesture, with her slim white hands, and had it not been for the horrible fear that haunted him, Bellucci would

hardly have missed the sound of her voice, so eloquent is beauty, so soul-satisfying. But as it was, alternately her loveliness lifted him up upon dizzy peaks of delight and desire, whence her immutable silence straightway dragged him down.

Never had he spent an evening of such vicissitudes of feeling. Faint with weariness, sick with disappointment, he rose at ten o'clock, saying with apparent reluctance but very real relief, that no later hour for going to bed was accounted *Kurgemäss*. He said au revoir to Madame Paravicini, and with a secret tremor held out his hand in turn to the radiant being by her side.

"Won't you bid me good night?" he asked, and something of the sharpness of strained foreboding crept into the

melodious Southern voice. There was a little pause, and then:

"Good night," she said, with the adorable air of a good child saying its lesson.

Bellucci's heart gave a great leap, and before the cold eyes of the mother he had the effrontery to stoop and kiss the slim white hand of the girl.

"Good night, good night," sang in his ears all the dark hours — a sweeter note of promise than had ever sounded for him before. No caress, he told himself, had ever been half so blinding sweet as that reluctant, grave but magic-working word, "Good night."

Three days later Bellucci begged his guests to pardon another evening's absence. The following morning one of

the ladies of his party inflicted a stormy scene upon him, and shook the dust of Tarasp from off her feet.

The remaining lady to her own great exasperation, was forced for "foolish reasons of conventionality" to follow the irate one's example. Bellucci, to his joy, was as good as alone, for the Duc de Boutray, had found diversion in Madame Sauvan. Every one at Vulpera — every one at Tarasp and even as far as Schulz — knew that the driver of the smart coach, the famous Count Renzo Bellucci, was infatuated by the English beauty at the Waldhaus, and one and all they speculated upon the result.

Certainly it was that Bellucci alone had been able to overcome, to some extent, the icy aloofness of the mother. Ah,

yes, the old story. Bellucci was irresistible. Men chaffed in public, and in private some of them sighed. But one and all they wanted to know if the girl ever talked, and what did she say? When Bellucci smiled and shook his head they pretended still to believe in that old legend of her dumbness, or else in a hideous and embarrassing impediment in her speech. But Bellucci could laugh at all that now. To be sure, she had said little, very little. She was no chatterer, thank God! A peerless creature like that could afford to leave the meaner arts of conversation, and of smiles, to her poorer sisters. Was it not her beautiful quietness that first of all had cast a spell upon him, worn out with the restless tricks of other women — social acrobats, he called

them in his contempt. It was impossible to conceive Alicia Paravicini condescending to vivacity. She would have the air, even in a crowded drawing-room, of being alone in some enchanted spot sacred to beauty and to silence. All the same, he *would* have liked her to speak in more than monosyllables; and he would above all have liked to see her oftener — more intimately.

But the truth was that Madame Paravicini was very chary of her favors. Sometimes for three or four days Bellucci had only distant glimpses of the pair, as they came in and out from driving or from mass. Once only did he follow them into the primitive little chapel. Madame Paravicini looked at him with a chill disdain that made him regret his enterprise. But he saw his

young goddess telling her beads with rapt devotion, and was vaguely glad to be assured that she had been brought up a Catholic. He had never cared to know what Madame Paravicini's or any other woman's faith was — but his wife should be a Catholic. It stood in his mind for a great deal more than orthodoxy; it comported better with his requirements, his ideals; it was more fitting, more feminine than Protestantism. He looked at the rosary slipping slowly through the girl's fingers, and told himself such prayers should be registered upon a thing of greater beauty than a string of carved wooden beads. With which mental note he slipped out of the chapel to avoid meeting again the eyes of Madame Paravicini. He was afraid of nothing so

much as of driving his advantage to the breaking-point. Warily, as he thought, he bided his time. But his sensitive vanity could not brook that others should know how little, in reality, he saw of the Paravicinis. Many an evening when he was supposed to be with them he was pacing his own apartments, or smoking in the friendly fragrant darkness of his own loggia, "biding his time."

Some of his leisure he employed in superintending at the local jeweler's the making of a reliquary in the form of a heavy heart of gold. He lamented the banalité of the design, but — a country jeweler! When at last it was finished he laid inside it a rosary of great value, and waited impatiently for the blessed moment when he should give the highly unso-

phisticated-looking emblem to the girl, and ask if he might hope that some day she would give him in return that heart of more than gold, yea, than of much fine gold — the heart he coveted above all things of price.

But the days went by and Madame Paravicini seemed to have determined to revoke her decision and to withdraw her acquaintance. The regulation three weeks' cure lacked only forty-eight hours of being completed, and few of the Kurgäste ever stayed longer. For six weary days Bellucci had not come to speech with Madame Paravicini nor seen the girl save in their always hurried passing. In despair he sent a note, begging that he might be received that evening. Madame Paravicini replied that she was fatigued and must decline. He then sat

down and wrote her an adroit epistle full of respectful persuasiveness, asking if she would consider his becoming a suitor for the hand of her daughter. The answer ran in all the brevity of four words:

Come to-morrow at four.

III

WHEN Bellucci appeared on the following afternoon at the threshold of Madame Paravicini's sitting-room he found her standing by a table in the middle of the apartment, with much more of expectancy, more even of subdued excitement, than he had anticipated. What had before often passed through his mind became a fixed certainty: "She is going to revenge herself! She is going to punish me at this last moment by showing me all that her enmity will cost me." Well, he would make a good fight for it. He came in and greeted her quietly.

"Do you mind closing the door?"

He did so, and she pointed to a chair, but, as she herself still stood, he simply leaned on the back of his and looked at

her, full of fresh foreboding which he strove to hide. At last:

"You have not kept your promise," he said, feeling his way. "You shut me out for six mortal days!"

"I have not been well. The place has not agreed with me."

"Then why have you stayed?" he asked suspiciously.

"It seemed to suit Alicia — so I've stayed on for her sake."

"You are very fond of her!" he said, feeling anew all the crazy hopelessness of his errand. She took no notice of his exclamation.

"Will you continue 'to stay on' for her sake?"

"No; my doctor orders me to St. Moritz."

"When?"

"We go to-morrow."

"Will you let me drive you there?"

She shook her head.

"Thank you. We have already made arrangements."

He threw down his hat, walked a few paces to the loggia and back again.

"Then you have sent for me only to —?"

"You mistake. I never sent for you."

"I beg your pardon! I made a formal proposal for the hand of your daughter — you give me twenty-four hours' hope, and write me I am to come to you to-day, only to be told —" he ended with an inarticulate sound of anger.

"To be told what?"

"Some version, I suppose, of 'all our arrangements are made.' Oh, I under-

stand it well enough. I was stark mad to hope for a single moment." He stopped in the middle of the room opposite her and, with gleaming, narrowed eyes, he said:

"Of course! This is your hour."

"No," she said, "*this* is not my hour."

They stood facing each other a few seconds and then he burst out:

"For the love of heaven — tell me what you mean to do!"

She left the table and sat down looking straight before her, almost like one in a trance. Presently he flung up his hands with a gesture of despair.

"I don't know in what mood of madness I came to you. I know still less why I've stayed. But I cannot endure it an instant longer. Will you or will

you not give me your daughter for my wife?"

"I should not have thought even *you*, Satanuccio, would need to be told that rather than give a child of mine to you I would kill her with my own hands."

"Then why," he said, white with fury, "why in the name of the Mother of God did you not say as much last night?"

"Because Alicia is not my child."

"Not your — whose child is she?"

"Paravicini's."

Bellucci drew a long breath.

"Then you do not mean to oppose my suit?"

"That Alicia is not my daughter makes it less easy for me absolutely to refuse. . . ."

"Yes, yes." He wondered vaguely at the incorrigible conscientiousness of the English mind. "I shall be able to make good settlements," he said, to strengthen her intention of acting for the good of the girl.

Madame Paravicini waved the consideration aside.

"Alicia has a fortune of her own."

"But if you no longer stand in my way, why not be generous and help me?"

"How?"

"Let me have the opportunity afforded by the drive to St. Moritz. Let me take you."

She shook her head.

"No; even though she is not my daughter, I think jealously of our hours alone, especially if they're coming to an

end. Besides, Alicia is very reserved — very shy. You have to remember she has shared the life of a recluse — *my* life. I may tell you, since you bid me be generous," — she smiled oddly — "I may tell you, you will be wise to make haste slowly."

"Very well. I bow to you decision."

They sat silent for a few moments. Then the woman said suddenly:

"When would you want to take her away from me — supposing Alicia listens to you?" Something indefinable in her manner, something not sad, not even in the least regretful, gave Bellucci pause. A formless suspicion fell upon him as he thought how invariably it was held to be a man's affair to ask — to urge the marriage day.

"I should like to consult Alicia," he

said guardedly. "I would not dream — especially after what you have said — of hurrying, of frightening her. She must come to know me."

Madame Paravicini rose nervously, as though to force the conference to a close.

"I am glad to find you so reasonable," she said, with ironic intonation. "You will not mind, then, if Alicia and I continue our journey after a short stay at St. Moritz."

"Your journey where?"

"Did you not know? We are on our way to Italy."

Bellucci maintained a face absolutely guiltless of expression.

"Yes, I have promised for years to show Alicia her father's country. She has wanted all her life to go to the

South. Poor child! She loves Italy," — Madame Paravicini's eyes fell on Bellucci — "she loves Italy as exiles do."

He saw the girl fading out of his reach. That wall, not to be scaled by him, was rising up between them, icy, impassable, peak on peak — the mighty Alps! For a moment his self-command deserted him.

"You won't take her out of my reach!" he cried.

"Oh, no!" said the woman, smiling; "only to Italy."

"Devil!" he said in his heart. "She means to play me false, after all." Then aloud:

"How long will you be in St. Moritz?"

"Several days, I should say," she

answered indifferently, "unless the Maloja wind is blowing."

"Then why not turn your back to the Foehn and go to Lucerne or —?"

"Because I must go to Italy. I will be frank. Not only on account of Alicia's strong desire, but for private reasons, I must be in Genoa in a fortnight."

"In a fortnight?" The feeling of having to think against time gave him a sensation of physical breathlessness. "A fortnight! Have you any idea what is her state of mind in regard to me?"

"She likes you."

"Has she ever liked any one more?"

"No."

"Then she must — you might as well tell me — she must have begun caring for me?"

"Your logic is irresistible." Madame Paravicini smiled. "But as I warned you, she is shy. She will admit things to me — she will do things for me that she will for no one else!"

"You have a great influence over her?"

"Naturally."

"Would she marry me if you told her to?"

"Yes!" the monosyllable rang disagreeably harsh. "But you don't imagine I would try to coerce her?"

"No! no! Of course not. Still your influence and —" Suddenly he dropped his deferential air and eyed her with undisguised suspicion. "If you are playing fair, you will give me every opportunity to induce Alicia not to accompany you to Italy."

"I might do that and still leave you far from your desire. Also, I might do better than that."

"I am well aware of it. Instead of being neutral you might . . . Why shouldn't the marriage take place in a fortnight or so, if you used your influence in my favor."

"Why should I be at pains to serve you — you, of all men on the face of the earth?"

"Why shouldn't you — for Alicia's sake? Ought you, *can* you stand between her and happiness? For though you may smile and though you may sneer, I *shall* make her happy!" he said in hot-headed fashion.

"I shall not prevent you from trying."

"You promise?"

"I promise. But —"

"Yes?"

"Walk warily. Although I make no pretense of being friendly to you, you will do well to remember my warning. You will have in Alicia to deal with a nature you are little fitted to understand.

"I will learn."

"Then you must be content to learn slowly. She is not like — the women you have known best." Bellucci turned away his eyes. "You will find her less generous, more self-contained, one who will better guard that dearest of woman's possessions —"

Bellucci moved restively.

" —her mystery," added Madame Paravicini, to his surprise.

He opened his eyes like one relieved from the fear of moral commonplaces.

"I had not realized *that* was the name of the dearest possession."

"How should you? The world, too, gives it another name."

"At all events, in this case," he hastened to say, "I cannot go wrong, for I shall not move a step without your guidance, madame. And although I do not expect you to believe it, if you bring me to my goal, or if you allow me to reach it, the future shall show my gratitude."

Bellucci started for St. Moritz four hours before the Paravicinis, but he reached there half an hour later, having rested his horses at Zernetz.

As he dashed down from the Dorf into the Bad about seven o'clock in the evening, all St. Moritz stopped to stare.

Up on the high piazza of the Hôtel du Lac Bellucci saw, with a sense of reassurement, Madame Paravicini and her daughter, waiting to assist at his triumphal entry.

That night he drew from the older woman the admission that she had taken the opportunity during their long drive to speak of him and to say the preparatory word.

"I said very little — I thought it to your interest."

"Then may I —?" he looked longingly across the private sitting-room to where the girl sat languidly laying the patience-cards.

"I wouldn't say anything to-night; she is tired by the long drive."

"Might I not give her a little souvenir of Tarasp?"

"Oh . . . yes."

He went over, and, with a pretty speech, presented to her the golden heart, showed her it was a reliquary, and how within was the rosary blessed by Pope Paul in the sixteenth century.

Alicia's smile seemed to open the gates of paradise, her soft "Thank you" was such guerdon as he felt men might have died for.

"And if you accept mine, will you not give me yours in return?"

She looked at him inquiringly.

"Ah, *say* that you will give me your heart?"

"My heart . . . ," she answered like a mountain echo — but with the grave, dim smile, it meant to him a maid's consenting.

The next day Madame Paravicini reported that Alicia had no objection to offer to the plan of a marriage in St. Moritz. Bellucci did not disguise his desire to fly to her at once and tell her of his rapture.

"She has a headache this morning," said Madame Paravicini. "I have advised her to keep quiet. Why not write to her?"

"I will, of course."

So he poured his soul upon paper and was well rewarded by Alicia's brief but charming answer, written in a curious, unformed hand. He began, however, after his next day's short and unsatisfactory visit, to chafe at the absurd barriers of conventionality set up between the lovers by Madame Paravicini. Never for an instant did she

leave them alone. It was awkward for a man of Bellucci's reputation to protest, above all to Madame Paravicini! She not only absorbed the conversation when the three did meet, but she frequently put words into the mouth of the girl, who spoke them with a phonographic obedience. It several times crossed Bellucci's mind that the girl was afraid of her. On the rare occasions when he addressed some direct question to Alicia, to see her beautiful eyes seeking Madame Paravicini's for permission to reply, and for a hint of how, strengthened him in his suspicion. Her marriage day would be her day of deliverance, and it could not come too soon.

"I am sure Alicia likes coaching," he said to Madame Paravicini on that

third evening at St. Moritz, as he was bidding her good night.

"What makes you think so?"

"Would there be anything odd in her telling me so much?"

"I have not observed her doing so."

"Ah, but haven't you seen it in her face? — I have. Let us go to Maloja to-morrow."

Madame Paravicini shook her head.

"We have decided to do an excursion by ourselves to-morrow to Alp Grum."

Bellucci tried to master his disappointment and to mask his anger.

"I am disappointed," he said, "that you — that Alicia after agreeing to so much should not let me see her oftener."

"A woman who marries at a fortnight's notice has much to do."

"To go to Alp Grum for instance."

Madame Paravicini turned away.

"I tell you," he began hotly; and then, as often happened, he caught himself back from the pitfall of impetuosity, conscious that whether or not it was essential to "walk warily" in Alicia's sight, he must at all events make shift to do so before the enigmatic eyes of "the mother." If he had not been blinded, absorbed in the girl, he would have formulated to himself the vague feeling that Madame Paravicini's behavior, and her point of view, completely baffled him. But considering her not at all, he was little concerned to fathom the intricacies of her character. He would keep to the windward of her caprice till after he had got his will; and then good-by again, and this time forever, to Madame Paravicini!

Two days later, while giving some directions to a servant, Madame Paravicini did not fail to notice that Bellucci employed the time in carrying on a hurried conversation in an undertone with Alicia.

"She confesses," said Bellucci, gaily, when the servant had gone, "that she would like to be driven to Maloja. What do you say, Madame Paravicini?"

"If Alicia likes," she said indifferently.

"You would — wouldn't you?" he repeated to the girl.

"Yes," she said smiling.

"I've been telling her," Bellucci pursued, partly to allay Madame Paravicini's suspicion if she had any as to the drift of those hurried words aside — partly to foster an interest

in the expedition — "I've been telling Alicia about the castle there; do you know it — on the hill; above the head of the Silser See? My grandfather began to build a seat there and never finished it. You get a fine view."

"Oh, I don't mind giving up one day," said Madame Paravicini with an indulgent air, "especially if it amuses Alicia. But you must not ask for another."

"You mean *before* the sixteenth."

She nodded

"Of course I mean not another before the marriage — these long outings are very tiring, we find."

But Bellucci was supported by the thought of the opportunities offered by the morrow at Maloja, and by the nearness of the sixteenth. Blessed day!

when he should be rid of the nightmare of Madame Paravicini's enigmatic presence — when he should be alone with Alicia!

IV

Bellucci's coach stood before the Hôtel du Lac at eleven precisely. At a quarter-past, the ladies were in their places; Bellucci sprang on the box and gathered up the long ribbons, one of the smart men in livery sounded the gleaming horn, and off dashed the four gray horses amid the admiring envy of the assembled crowd. Alicia, in her white-embroidered cloth, had never looked more adorable. But her supposed pleasure in coaching found little expression. If Bellucci realized this omission, a glance over his shoulder at the peerless face atoned a thousandfold. Such beauty as hers was answer to all questions, was guerdon for all imaginable service. He drove with merciless skill, pleased that Alicia

showed no shrinking at the breakneck pace. How like her it was, how worthy of her, to spare him the foolish shrieks and tremors of other women! Such manifestations had always annoyed him — he never realized before how much.

Through Camfer, along the chain of lakes by Silvaplana and by a détour through Sils Marie — back to the Inn side, and along the Silser See — lightly, swiftly, flew the gray horses in their scarlet trappings.

In less than two hours' time Bellucci pointed with his whip to a tower crowning the height above the lake.

"Look," he said, "that is Castellontano."

The girl leaned forward with clasped hands, murmuring softly ——

"Castellontano."

"It is beautiful," said the mother.

"Beautiful," echoed the girl.

"It isn't really," said Bellucci, depreciatingly. "It was never finished, as you will see. I'll take you over it after luncheon."

They had that meal at the Kursaal, the huge hotel at the head of the lake — just at the bottom of the castle-crested hill.

"Does no one live up there, in your *Schloss?*" asked Madame Paravicini, in one of the pauses.

"I believe there are usually a couple of old servants about," answered Bellucci, "because sometimes an Austrian friend of my father's comes — or used to come — for a few weeks in the summer. A queer old *Naturforscher*, who was a

poet, I've been told, in the days of his youth. Alpine gardening was the hobby some years ago. The last time I saw him he was trying experiments on the rocks this side of the castle."

"Do you ever stay here yourself?" asked Madame Paravicini.

"Not I," he said, with emphasis.

"Why not?"

"Wait till you see it."

On the way up the hill Bellucci stopped short.

"If he hasn't fenced in his garden! And from the look of the place I should say he was in residence." And Bellucci laughed.

They went on, opened a rustic gate, and followed a little upward, winding path among moss and heather-covered rocks. In a hundred nooks, planted in

sheltered pockets of soil and screened by branches of trees stuck in the ground, were specimens of Alpine flora, every separate company of brave little plants bearing, like a banner, their high-sounding style and title on a label in the Latin tongue. Bellucci laughed again.

"Think of spending your time here doing that!" And he led the ladies on, up and down, till they came to the bridge where the path meets the Maloja road.

"Alicia," said Madame Paravicini, "that is the road to Italy."

"To Italy!" exclaimed the girl, as who should say, "To paradise!" She stepped softly on the broad white highway, as a pilgrim aware she walks on holy ground.

From a distance Castellontano ap-

peared to be a compact edifice, consisting of two square stone towers of unequal height enclosing between them a parallelogram which had along its upper story a loggia open to the lake.

The unfinished building operations on the right of the great tower came well into view as they approached, restoring the largeness of the original design.

What was most remarkable about Castellontano, architecturally, was its foundation. The castle was upborne upon a mighty series of arches or short tunnels rising massively to a considerable height, out of the mother rock.

"It was daring," said Madame Paravicini, looking up and seeing how on all sides, save the one by which they came, the foundation walls sheered down steep

to the valley, "yes, it was a daring thought to set a castle on this wild hill-top."

"More daring than you dream. It looks bold enough from here, but at the back — well, I don't care for it myself."

"What is it like?"

"Oh, you have a genial little view out of your drawing-room windows five hundred feet straight down a precipice. I've always thought it argued ill for my father's taste — his degree of cultivation — that he cared in piping times of peace to perch up here like a robber baron, in the very face of Nature's blackest scowl. It betokened a survival of the barbaric. But he repented, be it said to his credit — repented, abandoned more than half his plan, and fled. From this side" — Bellucci paused and

looked back upon the lake — "nothing could be more charming. Don't you agree, Madame Paravicini?"

While he stood pointing out the mountain-peaks by name Alicia took the unusual initiative of following alone a little path to the left, just under the castle wall. Bellucci turned, suddenly missing her.

"My God!" he cried, "come back! Come back!"

The tall white figure stood motionless on the crest of the hill. Bellucci dashed forward, and laying his hands on her shoulders drew her back. Her eyes remained fixed, staring down. There was a little sign stuck on the hillside, and a lean black hand pointed downward, after the words *Val d'Enfer.*

"Alicia," he said soothingly; and she

clung to him, but not as one who is alarmed. He was secretly thrilled by her confiding yet unfrightened action.

"Come, my beautiful," he whispered as Madame Paravicini was seen approaching. "We will go inside." She smiled, and in that moment Renzo Bellucci tasted of content.

An old servant opened the door and gave his master blinking and uncertain greeting.

"Yes, yes, it's really I," exclaimed Bellucci. "No wonder you've almost forgotten me. Is Herr Stockau here?"

"Yes, signor."

"Well, you may show us about — all but his suite."

There were only two other rooms furnished, besides the occupied ones, and these were swathed in linen and

covered with dust. But the decorations were good, and nothing seemed out of repair.

"I wonder you don't stay here, when you are in the Engadine."

"Yes, I wonder," said Alicia, with eyes shining.

"You don't mean you like it?"

"Oh, yes!" and it was said with more of conviction than any syllables he had ever heard her utter. He led the way to the great drawing-room facing the south. Alicia moved quickly to one of the windows.

"Oh!" she exclaimed softly, "*oh!*"

Her mother followed. Far away below them lay the valley, mountain-hemmed. Madame Paravicini leaned against the window-jamb as if glad of some solid support. The eye dropped

down, with nothing to catch or to sustain the falling vision — down, down to the deep-lying Val Bregaglia. Alicia leaned out, with a half-smile illumining the calmness of her face.

"Come," said Bellucci, "we'll go to the tower."

It was here they found one of the furnished rooms, intended apparently for a ladies' boudoir, and with windows, two on each side, looking forth to the four quarters of the world.

"I believe this is the most charming of all," said Madame Paravicini.

"Yes," agreed Alicia.

Later they were looking at the view from the loggia.

"Where is Alicia?" said Bellucci suddenly; and he had hunted half over the castle before he found her in the

boudoir leaning out of a window that looked toward Italy.

The thought stabbed at him — just for *him* it was impossible to gratify her long romantic dream. If it had been anything else in all the world! — and he fell to laying plans for entrapping her proud reserve into confession of other dreams and dearer longings, that he, in satisfying them, might conjure back the light in those lamps of Italy. For, true hedonist as he was, Bellucci was at times quite as ready as more generous men to brighten his own way by the reflected radiance of another's pleasure. Like a certain famous Florentine he would be capable on occasion of extending the affection he felt for himself to the members of his immediate family.

Coming back from their inspection of

the place, they sat down for a while on a bench conveniently placed on a hillock above the Alpine garden. Madame Paravicini began to speak of the arrangements for the wedding, and of her gratification that that great light among Roman prelates, Monsignor Bertarelli, would be in St. Moritz in time to officiate. Alicia, during the discussion of these details, got up and gathered several sprays of heather, which she fastened in her frock.

Presently Madame Paravicini glanced over her shoulder.

"Where is Alicia? I never knew her so restless as she is to-day. Alicia!" They went back toward the castle and there she was, standing under the nearest of the great arches looking through into the Val Bregaglia.

It flashed over Bellucci that her interest might be, after all, chiefly in the place itself, rather than the land that it looked out on — was it a pretty, shy little compliment to her future husband — a sign of romantic interest in his family and associations?

She turned round as she heard them coming. Her face dazzled him. He clean forgot his own dislike of the place — forgot the difficulty of making it habitable at short notice — forgot everything save the desire to prevent the new light from leaving the passionless beauty of Alicia's face.

"Would you like to stay here for a few weeks after we are married?" he said.

"Yes," she answered.

"Then we will."

In spite of the interest in and excitement about the event, participated in by all the gay world at St. Moritz, the wedding took place very quietly on the day arranged. Admission to the church was to be obtained by card only, and no card was ever more difficult to come by.

After the ceremony and the signing of the register, Madame Paravicini kissed Alicia and parted from her in the vestibule of the church. Standing back there in the shadow, she watched Bellucci lead out his bride through a dense crowd gathered at the door, and put her in the waiting coach.

Alicia's demeanor struck Bellucci as nothing short of perfection. He had seen ladies under this trying ordeal who wept and made their husbands

ridiculous; ladies who giggled nervously and were facetious with their friends; ladies who grew red and awkward and tripped over their trains. Alicia passed through the gaping crowd as though she walked alone in a wood, noticing the people no more than if they had been rows of trees; yet wholly without hauteur, without the air of realizing that she inflicted any slight on her few acquaintance or showed any singular lack of the traditional bride's trepidation. And this piece of flawless perfection was his own! The hour of joy had struck. Madame Paravicini had faded into the Past. He was alone with Alicia and the Future.

V

THEY had been married two weeks, and for two weeks they had been at Castellontano; but no eye had seen them oustide the castle walls. The great Kursaal had given hospitality in that fortnight to many a party — from Pontresina, St. Moritz, and neighboring places — parties made up for the sole purpose of catching a glimpse of the Count Bellucci and his bride. Shameless sightseers gathered of an afternoon on the Maloja road, hoping to encounter the pair walking or driving by.

But the only sign of life upon the castle hill to solace their curiosity was the occasional apparition of a grotesque-looking old man, whose back seemed well-nigh doubled with bending down to watch, through enormous magnify-

ing-spectacles, the health of his Alpine nurslings. People who ventured to ask him about the newly married pair had stares for answer and a shake of the uncouth head. The one who got farthest with him elicited:

"I have my own apartments"; this followed by a grunt as much as to say, "I don't permit even my host to bother me."

At last the expeditions made with the hope of encountering the Belluccis were abandoned, but tongues wagged the faster with wonder and surprise. Switzerland was fast emptying; in another week most of the hotels would close and the gay world would be gathered elsewhere until the St. Moritz winter season set in. The day before his departure from the Engadine the Duc de

Boutray wrote to Bellucci, bantering him on the subject of his invisibility, and hoping he was not going to turn Bluebeard — but if not, why had he shut up his beautiful Fatima? And when might his friends hope for a glimpse of him? The letter closed with several bits of news, among them the information that Madame Paravicini's journey to Italy had been interrupted by a feverish attack at Thusis, where she was to remain till she was quite restored.

That very day the lingerers-on at the Kursaal were rewarded by seeing Count Bellucci pass by in a landau — alone. He wore his hat low over his eyes and sat rigid, with folded arms.

Strangely enough, he was traveling by extra post, and without servants.

Arrived at Thusis, he stopped at the Via Mala Hotel, refused even to look at his rooms, demanded to be shown instantly to Madame Paravicini's and, all travel-stained as he was, presented himself at her door. The man-servant who showed him up knocked and stood waiting.

"You may go," said Bellucci. He himself paused only an instant longer, and then knocked again. The maid appeared.

"Madame is not well, she does not see any one."

"She will see me." Setting his shoulder to the door he pushed past her. The woman he was looking for lay on a sofa in the fading light, with her fingers betwen the pages of a closed book.

"Ah," she said quietly, "it is you."

"Yes, it is I," and he stood like one rooted, staring down upon her impas-

sivity with burning eyes. The maid disappeared into the adjoining room and closed the communicating door.

"Would you not prefer to send her out of earshot?" he said.

Madame Paravicini made a motion of indifference with her shoulders, and then called:

"Christine!"

"Madame!" She opened the door.

"You may go down now. I shall not need you till ten — till I ring."

The maid closed the hall-door behind her. They listened to her footfalls dying down the corridor. Bellucci threw down his hat.

"Tell me," he cried, "am I asleep or am I awake? Have I, for the last dozen days, been dreaming or — is it true?"

"Is what true?"

"Is Alicia — is she — ?" His voice dropped, his courage seemed to fail him. "Is she like other women?"

"Surely you thought not — or why choose her from all the rest of the world?"

"Don't juggle with words," he said with haggard weariness, dropping into a chair. "I *have* to come to you; for no one else knows."

"You forget that I have not seen Alicia since her marriage. I do not know what effect it has had on her."

"Then I will try to give you a faint idea," he said bitterly; "no words could convey the full horror of the truth. But I shall not leave you without knowing whether something has happened, something I cannot grasp, that suddenly has

killed her soul; or whether —" He looked at the woman before him with a tigerish intensity as though he would tear out her heart.

"What has happened?" she asked quietly.

Bellucci leaped to his feet and paced the room. Suddenly stopping in front of her he said almost in a whisper:

"Part of the horror of it is its vagueness. There are times when I feel that it is not she who is so strange, but I. This much is certain: never since I took her from you at the church has she uttered to me, or to any one, a single word, of her own accord."

"Ah," Madame Paravicini smiled ironically. "Your complaint against her is that she does not chatter. But you knew that."

Bellucci smothered an oath.

"But Alicia is always well-bred," Madame Paravicini went on calmly. "She will always answer you when you speak to her — unless you speak rudely. A harsh word silences her."

"A harsh word? My God! or a kind one, or any word of any sort. At most I have got 'Thank you,' or echoed repetitions of what I myself have said."

"Surely an ideal characteristic in a wife, Satanuccio. She will never disagree with you."

"What I am here to know is, has she been like that with you? Or has some sudden shock or jar — women are so strange, such brittle creatures —" he murmured brokenly to himself, passing his hand across his brow. "But," he turned again upon the one lying be-

fore him, "have you seen her in this mood?"

"I have not, I repeat, any knowledge of her 'after-marriage mood.'"

"Do you tell me you have had no experience of the nervous strain of being dumbly watched hour after hour — day in, day out — by those haunting eyes?"

"I found other occupation for those eyes. Has she given up her tapestry work?"

"God's pity, no! If ever her eyes leave me, they are fixed upon the hideous monotony of that endless embroidery?"

Madame Paravicini smiled. "Yes, she has a passion for sixteenth-century design. Does she still use up her silks like magic?"

He made no answer.

"I must send her a fresh consignment."

"No! no!" Bellucci roused himself. "But all this is childish and beside the mark. Has she lived at your side, day in, day out, like this — uttering no human sound to reassure you — to take away the sense of the abyss between two souls?"

"*That* is always there. Speech can do no more than weave a cobweb over the chasm."

"Then it is upon that cobweb that life and reason hang. I tell you, her silence has filled the world with tumult!" He lifted his hands with a terrified gesture to his head — crying out: "Against such silence I have to stop my ears!" Then presently, with enforced calmness, "As I say, I have at times doubted

my sanity,— small wonder if I've bruised my wits against that blank, dead wall. Do you understand what I am saying? I have found out that I cannot make Alicia happy — that I cannot make her sad —"

"Ah, you've begun to try that!"

"No! no! God's pity! Don't misunderstand. I only mean that with me she will not laugh or weep, be glad or mourn, or give any single sign of —"

"Of what?"

"— of belonging to the race of men."

"I thought you were pleased from the first to take her for an angel."

He ignored the jibe.

"From the first!" he echoed, seeming to try to master and collect his thoughts. "As I look back, the qualities I admired in her were not qualities — they

were the absence of qualities. It was that she was not this or that — things that in my intercourse with other women had harassed or enraged me. She did *not* flirt; she did *not* cheapen herself; she did *not* forever smile and chatter — would to God she did! She did *not* give little shrieks and clutches when I lashed up the horses — but I would give half my fortune to hear her crying out or have her catch at my arm. Alicia faces danger as she faces life, with the same dead calm with which the rock of Castellontano looks up to the sunrise, or down at nightfall into the blackness underneath!" He paused an instant — and then, with something like a sob, he caught his breath. "I pour out my heart to her — she wears an air of listening, but her soul is far away.

If I ask her questions, she smiles vaguely or shakes her head. She is a stranger — I had almost said a spy in my house. I know her no better than on the day I saw her first. Shall I ever know her? Tell me, what is behind the veil?"

"I cannot tell you."

"You *cannot?*"

"I do not know."

"You do not know! You've known her all her life."

"And yet she is as strange to me as she is to you."

"My God, she is mad!" He staggered back a step, and in the pause he covered his face with his hands.

"We say, 'she is not like others,'" corrected Madame Paravicini. "They are your own words as well — almost the first you ever said about her."

Not like others! The phrase had been one of the few sincere compliments he had ever paid a woman. Not like others! Its ghastly new sense staggered him.

"You also said her beauty was 'strange.' It is a word we have often used in speaking of Alicia. You will find that with *her* at all events familiarity does not breed contempt. She will always be — 'a little strange.'"

"Then you knew the full extent of the infamous wrong you did me?"

"One never knows the full extent of any act. Each one is a pebble in a pool — the widening circles carry us to infinity."

"That I should never have guessed! That the real reason should never have touched the outermost edge of my con-

sciousness — why you held me at arm's length, after firing me with her witch's beauty!"

"It is true, men are *sometimes* punished for ignoring devotion and the things of the spirit — for staking all upon the lust of the eye."

"Then *this* is your hour, after all," he said.

"This is my hour."

He lifted up his hands with the impotence of wordless horror. Then as he struggled to find his voice he came closer in the gathering twilight and bent over her.

"I can understand your wanting to be revenged on *me* — but Alicia! How dared you make such devil's mockery of another — an innocent woman's happiness?"

"Happiness!" she echoed with low scorn; "to hear your pleading that happiness should be left to women! A new rôle for you, Satanuccio."

"By all that's holy, it *would* be a new rôle for me to play a trick so hellish as this of yours. A fellow-creature who has done you not the smallest wrong, who trusted you —"

With both hands she thrust the menacing figure back, stood up and faced him in the dusk.

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"An echo! an echo across thirty years! They are my own words to you, that night we said good-by. No, Satanuccio, the only new thing is that the parts are changed. You have played yours for thirty years — I played mine this one little month of summer. As for Alicia! Alicia knows neither happiness

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nor unhappiness. You have had proof of it for a few days. I for twenty-six years. I knew you were not likely to ill-treat her in the vulgar way of violence. You will not starve her body — you cannot starve *her* soul." She began to laugh hysterically.

"Give me credit for true judgment. She was the very woman for you — the only woman who with impunity could be trusted to your keeping. Go back to Castellontano in what black mood you will — or stay away and leave the lady there alone — *she* will not languish. *She* will not pine!" The voice rose sharp with the gathered anguish of years. "Alicia is the one woman in the world whose heart you cannot break."

Without a word, without raising his haggard eyes, Bellucci left the room.

VI

WHEN, on his return journey, he was within a mile of Castellontano, Bellucci called suddenly in a hoarse voice to the coachman:

"Turn back! Turn back!"

The Swiss opened his mouth to ask where he was to go, but a glimpse at the count's face made him determine that silent obedience was his safest course.

At Silvaplana, "Over the Julier Pass!" Bellucci shouted. "I'll take the train at Coire. Arrange it with the Post. I must not be kept waiting." And he flung the man some gold.

Bellucci wandered about, a few miserable days, in places too dismal, as it seemed to him, for it to be likely that he should meet any one who knew him. When he had endured it as long as he

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could he made up his mind it was best to go to Paris. At Bâle a glimpse of two of his former boon companions passing the window made him realize that he could not, after all, face the world as yet — his world — gay, cynical unsparing. So, like a hunted creature, he doubled on his track, and set his face toward Castellontano again.

It was sunset when he arrived, for after a sleepless night he had started on his homeward drive from Coire at five o'clock that morning.

"Madame is in the Tower Room," said old Rafaello.

Bellucci ran breathless up the narrow stair. Yes, there she sat! Had she moved from the window since he left her that morning for Thusis — half a century ago? He had been wrong to

speak of her as one without pursuits save watching him. Although it was true she never wrote a letter, or sang, or played a note, or opened a book — she had, after all, three other occupations. One, that he had shrunk from mentioning was staring down the Val Bregaglia; of another Madame Paravicini had reminded him — the well-nigh endless stitching at this horrible embroidery, as he called it. He had left her at it, and it was upon this she was engaged when, looking up, she saw her husband again before her. The needle she had put in underneath she drew slowly out on top, and then sat waiting with a dim smile on her face.

"How do you do?" he said.

"How do you do."

He looked at the vari-colored thing

that fell in folds from her lap down to the floor — so voluminous it must be meant for a coverlid, he thought, and shuddered at what dreams must come to one lying underneath. It was wrought with thick and shining silk of seven strands in a curious wave pattern. Up and down it flowed in pale, iridescent streams of many subtly shaded colors. As he stared at it the part that lay along the floor seemed to tremble into life, and then to crawl.

"Coil up that sea-serpent skin, Alicia, and put it out of my sight!"

She obeyed dumbly, and then sat looking at him with vacant eyes and white hands folded.

"For God's sake, speak to me!" he cried. "Say something."

No sound for several seconds, and

then with what seemed a supreme effort:

"When shall we go away?" she asked.

He turned and went downstairs. For he realized that going away was impossible — there was no other place for such a wife as his. After long neglect a use had been found at last for Castellontano.

As the days went on, although he was afraid — obscurely, defiantly afraid — of the process that should bring the change about, it seemed to him that Alicia was slowly coming out of her trance. The awakening, if indeed he did not imagine it, was inconceivably horrible to him. It did not yet lend expression to the terrible, beautiful face — but surely the frozen faculty of speech, little, by little, it was thawing.

Bellucci's life of cynical self-indulgence ill fitted him to welcome and to foster the poor, pitiful, first attempts of a soul groping its way out of the twilight. Better that she should say nothing, than utter childishness, he said to himself; thinking of himself first, himself last — himself above all. Although hatred of the incarnate "cheat" was growing upon him, he was still to no small extent under the æsthetic spell of her beauty. He must needs watch her, even if he watched her with deep unrest and deepening anger.

For, though much has been said about the obvious and superficial interest so easily excited by the expressive face, the "speaking countenance" vaunted as "reflecting every mood" is well known in the hearts of men to be a wanton,

ready to lay modesty and mystery at the feet of any passer-by; yielding up the deep things of the heart without an effort or a pang. A beautiful face that betrays little besides beauty — not limiting its significance by concrete expression, not wasting itself in facile looks, setting no petty bounds to its meaning and its message — such a face is the subtlest means nature has discovered for firing the souls of men — making poets and making heroes. Still, after all the world's long lessoning, you will hear of the fascination of a face "which mirrors every passing thought," and no word of the magic of immobility. It was this that in Alicia had arrested and held fast the dissolute fancy of the man at her side. Nor could he now effectually rid himself of the

conviction that some day that perfect face would render up its secret. And he watched it, hypnotized. Such a face might, if she would let it, express all that human hearts may know of gladness or regret; and he watched it, waiting, waiting — with a patience new to him, for the revelation that he felt must come. He studied that faint smile — no, it was not "smiled," it was implied. You had to be observant, or you lost it. It was, he discovered, rather a light in the face than a movement of the muscles; and it yet had meant more to him than any other woman's dimpled laughter. There were no lines in her face — there would never be, he told himself. What little she allowed to look out from "the windows of her soul" (the mockery of the phrase!) she suffered

to go no farther than the orbit of her eyes. Faint pleasure, dim regret — she kept the light and the shadow alike *inside* her eyes; nothing ever overflowed the long-fringed margins of those wells of darkness.

She had learned at last that when Bellucci was with her she must lay aside her fantastic work. As he sat moodily smoking, surreptitiously watching her listless hands and far-away eyes, she would sometimes rise and carry a little inlaid table over to the south window of the tower, and lay out the patience cards, her only other occupation. Bellucci, wholly ignorant of what he looked upon as an imbecile pastime for persons in their second childhood, watched in a listlessness mixed with contempt the apparently aimless sorting of the

cards. But he would follow, fascinated, the movement of the long white hands, and he would shudder when he remembered that he had never touched them but to find them cold. How typical of her this companionless game, in which there was neither expectation nor disappointment, neither winning nor losing. For although Bellucci did not know it, the Patience Alicia was trying was the intricate one of Kings and Queens.

Now this game is by so much like to marriage, that many play thereat and few are able to end the game with united couples. Alicia had seen Madame Paravicini do it, but it had never come right for her.

Still she would go on laying out the cards, stacking, shuffling, laying again,

stacking, shuffling, endlessly, hour after hour. And Bellucci would sit looking at her. He was mated to this. His keen perception mated to this deadness of sense, his hot spirit mated to this icy calm, his impatience to her patience. Ah, yes, her only game was not ill-chosen.

One day when he came up into the tower room he found the huge square of Alicia's bewildering embroidery hung across the north window.

"Why have you put that there?" he exclaimed angrily.

As she said nothing he tore it down and tossed it in the corner. But when he came the next evening there it was again, shutting out the Silser See and the view toward St. Moritz. This time he pretended not to notice how he had been disobeyed.

She sat by the south window in the twilight, mute, motionless.

"Speak to me, Alicia."

"When shall we go away?"

"I am not sure I shall go now. The chamois-hunting has begun."

She answered never a word. He thought how any other woman he had ever known would have cried out upon his broken promise, would have raged at her own disappointment, at his unfaith. And he smiled grimly to think how gladly he would listen to a torrent of reproach. *Her* face seemed only to grow colder and more marble-like — save for a slight flutter of the lowered eyelids.

"Well, have you nothing to say against my plan?" he cried in impotent exasperation.

She lifted her dark eyes and looked down the Bregaglia valley.

"It will be desolate here when —"

"When — ?" he leaned forward eagerly.

"Even now there are no birds."

The inconsequence of the remark maddened him. With a smothered oath he turned his back away from her, and leaned out of the window.

The wall, a fragment of it man-built, the rest rock-reared, dropped sheer down into the dusk. Not even a chamois, he said to himself, could find a footing there. He shut his eyes, for his head was swimming.

"It is that cursed tapestry of hers — it makes the tower rock." Cautiously he opened his eyes again. Alicia had

moved to the adjoining window, and was leaning out till her long chain, with its heavy heart of gold, fell over the stone sill and half a yard down the castle wall, clinking as it swayed. She watched the pendulum-like motion till it almost ceased, and then, taking the chain from round her neck, she unclasped it, and in a single strand, with the heavy heart at the end, allowed it to slip through her white fingers down into the twilight as far as it would go. She twisted the end of the chain twice round her forefinger and swung it to and fro, listening to the clink of the heart against the stone.

He had shut himself up here in the midst of such wild desolation with — what? He looked at her as she turned her face toward him in the

dusk, and he shrank from the mindless words she might be going to utter.

"I saw a bird once," the clear voice fell on him like cold water-drops, "but it would not stay. It flew down there toward Italy"; she pointed to the gloom-shrouded valley. "They have all gone now, but us — all gone down into Italy." She had never spoken so many consecutive words in his hearing before. But there was no gladness in his heart — nothing but shrinking and despair.

She had stopped swinging the chain and leaned a little farther out — a little farther — a little farther yet. Bellucci watched her, fascinated. He could easily have reached across the little space dividing the two windows and have touched her. But with a nervous grip he held to his stone window-ledge and

watched her with narrowed eyes. Would she go on in that half-crazed fashion, staring after the birds bound Southward, till she should some day lose her balance and go flying after them headlong down the precipice?

"Come in, come in," he called with sudden sharpness, "shut down the window! The night is cold."

The next day he went away chamois-hunting.

He came back from time to time and then was off again. The Autumn was a very open one — there had as yet been but one fall of snow, quickly disappearing under the ardent sun. The weather was unprecedented, and in Bellucci's absence Alicia roved about day and night, with growing restlessness. His returns home, lowering, sharp of tongue,

and filled from crown to heel with a burning impatience, seemed to snuff out the little marsh-light that had begun to flicker across the surface of Alicia's soul. It was as if her mind, at the crucial moment of her life, had come timidly to peer out upon the world, had seen Bellucci, and shrank back into those dim caves where only echoes came. She relapsed again into her old speechlessness, after one evening in the tower, where he found her on one of his returns. When she caught sight of him she put up her hands above her needlework as if begging him to let her go on.

"Pretty rainbows!" she said in a strange, coaxing tone, and as if encouraged that he forbore to tear the fabric from her, she passed her cold white fingers over the long stitches, saying

gently, "Feel! like feathers — like the breast of a bird."

He turned his eyes away from her, wondering at the gloom of the room, and saw that another piece of her tapestry was hung before the windows looking east.

"You want to shut out all the light with this damned stuff?" he cried.

"Yes," she answered tonelessly, "I will shut out all the light."

"Do you dream that I will let you?"

"Yes, Satanuccio."

He started. Had she overheard Madame Paravicini?

"Why do you call me that?"

"I call you by your name."

But she never spoke to him again.

VII

Coming back late one night, Bellucci heard some one moving about among the rocks and bushes on the slope of the castle hill. He stopped to listen.

"Is that you, Alicia?" he called. No answer.

"Who is there?" No sound.

"Is Herr Stockau in his rooms?" he asked Rafaello on entering.

"I do not know, signor. I will see."

Bellucci followed the man. In his study, bent down under the green shade of a lamp, sat the old Austrian before an open book. He wore a black skull-cap, and his spectacles gathered and focused all the light there was, magnifying horribly his faded eyes.

"Ah, Monsieur le Comte —" he rose

without pretense of welcome, but civilly enough.

"I heard you just now, did I not, coming up from the garden?"

"No, monsieur. I never go out so late. It is a walk sufficiently rugged by the light of day."

"I thought I heard some one."

"It was doubtless Madame la Comtesse."

"Oh, hardly."

"Beyond a doubt, monsieur" — and with a sudden roughness he said, "You are very much away of late."

"Yes, I always hunt a good deal at this time of the year." Bellucci turned to go. "Good night; I won't disturb your studies."

"Stop, monsieur. I have meant to come to you myself. I have meant to

say to you that Madame la Comtesse is too much alone."

Bellucci's eyes flashed an instant at his guest's temerity; then he shrugged his shoulders and laid his hand on the knob of the door.

"I tell you, monsieur," the old man went on roughly, "when you are not here — and I may at risk of your displeasure remind you, that means most of the time — Madame la Comtesse wanders about by herself, not only all the day, but half the night."

"What does it matter?" said Bellucci. "Everybody has gone." With a sudden menacing gleam in his eyes, he added: "There is no one here to spy upon her."

But if the Austrian interpreted rightly Bellucci's resentment of comment, he disregarded the warning.

"She ought not to be so much alone. I cannot think why she haunts the rocks above the Alpine garden."

"There is no *reason* in anything she does," said Bellucci brutally.

"At night," the old man went on, "there is no more desolate spot. It is strange, monsieur, that so fragile a lady should know no fear."

It was best that this old gnome should hear the truth and cease his troubling. Bellucci faced round upon him once more.

"I should have thought you would understand the lack of imagination, of *mind*, involved in not being afraid. You are quite right; my wife is never frightened." And he opened the door and shut it hard behind him.

But putting again into words that char-

acteristic of Alicia's gave it a new power to torment him. As he thought of this imperviousness to fear it became, more than ever, part and parcel of her uncanniness. It was this, more than anything else, that removed her at once, and forever, from the warm sentience of normal human life — made her sister to the rocks and caverns. Small wonder that she haunted them. She, too, in lieu of speech, had only echoes — for smiles and tears, for love, or hate, or fearing, an unshaken and impenetrable calm. That night he woke in the dark and closely-curtained bed room to see a pale light shining in through a crack in the door of Alicia's boudoir. Noiselessly he rose, crossed the floor and peered within. There she sat! — her black hair streaming over her shoulders, working by the

light of the great full moon — working at the abhorred design. As he stood staring at it the pale woman and the rock-built castle itself seemed to swim before his eyes. Without a word, he groped his way back, grateful for the dark. But when with head once more upon his pillow, he turned his face to the door, that little beam of pallid light seemed to pierce his brain. He shut his eyes, and lo! the design of Alicia's tapestry, in waves of color, was painted all across the dark!

Night after night he struggled with the vision, finding, as people with imagination may that, in the obscure chambers of the brain, form and color can be either noble stimulant or deadly poison. No wise man has yet come from the East, or from the West, to give us any

measure of the power these things have to lift up or to make sick the spirit. To Bellucci the pattern growing so swiftly under the cold, white fingers was a design of insane cunning to express Bewilderment — hopeless — stark! Yes, that was what it was! Dazed bewilderment — mind unmoored and drifting. Just that expressed in terms of color and of line.

His increasing hatred of his wife mingled with a half-mad desire — passion, rather — to force from her some sign of fear. Not for a moment meaning to carry out any such scheme, he fed his fancy with schemes of violence or horror which should stamp animal pain and shrinking, if nothing else, upon the changeless beauty of that face. But while fear kept as far aloof as ever from

Alicia — on a sudden it turned and leapt upon Bellucci. For — strange and horrible effect following upon this now complete day-time dumbness — *she began to talk in her sleep*, rapidly, volubly, indistinctly, but with an eagerness that seemed to grow. Bellucci who had longed so passionately for a glimpse into that soul, must needs listen, though he died. Like some guilty eavesdropper with ear to keyhole, he hung above her in the night, straining every nerve to piece her wildness into images of reason, or, failing that, to form some picture, for his own enlightenment, of the inside of that darkened mind. So long he had been asking: "What is it she thinks about all day? What was it that even in the days when I was kind she kept so jealously hid from me?" Was it

because his own heart beat so loud, and the blood throbbed in his ears to deafness, that he could find in the vague, broken phrases no faintest relation to the things of daylight and of reason? Again and again he caught the phrase, "The deep, deep wells" — and by degrees he made out the *words* of much more that she uttered, but was as far as ever from the meaning — if indeed he were not mad to look for meaning.

"Hush, hush!" she would whisper. "Come, Alicia, I will show you the deep wells. . . No one else must know. Wait till night. 'sh! Wait until the dark comes down." She would be quiet for a space. Then with eager excitement:

"Come! Come! Oh-h, the sharp

rocks hurt the hands — but climb up, climb up. *Ha!*" and she would clutch the counterpane. "The great slab is slipping," and she drew a sharp breath. "Ah! *Now!* 'sh! Do you see? *The gleam of water* . . . See, it smiles up at the little moon. So long it never saw the little moon. 'sh! 'sh! . . . Can you creep in under the rock? Move that thin slab — never mind hurt hands. There! Yes, there's room now . . . Oh-h . . . the deep, deep wells under the mossy rocks!" And her voice would grow inarticulate with wonder and excitement. Then more calmly she would whisper:

"One well is nearly dry. A great crack in the side — A big round stone at the bottom. Oh, the deep, deep well — all round and deep. The black one

full of inky water goes down — down under the world. 'sh! 'sh! Come away. Pull the slab back. No one must know."

Bellucci would lie and wait for dawn — for the blessed time of daylight, when dumbness should descend again. In vain each morning he resolved that he would sleep next night in the chamber farthest off from her, or else without the castle walls — in some safe place, where her horrible whispering could not torture his strained ears. But for all his vows, he would come creeping in each night and bend above her, listening to the legend of "the wells."

"Come," he said to her harshly one late afternoon, "come, show me where you walk when I go hunting, and you are here alone."

She dropped her eyes. Bellucci rang the bell.

"Bring your mistress a hat and cloak," he said. "I shall wait for you, Alicia, down at the door." Presently she joined him.

"Now where?" She seemed to think a moment and then led the way round to the place where the building had so long ago been abandoned. Some of it was mere foundation. Some of it had reached the height of its first tall story. Late in the year as it was, the doorways opened on flower-carpeted courts and the windows framed great squares of orange sunshine. Without an instant's pause she led the way to the door that the audacious architect had made to open out upon the precipice. She stood there quietly looking down. Bellucci

noticed how the little pointed shoe on one of Alicia's fearless feet projected a full inch over the cliff.

"Is it *here* you come?" he asked, incredulous. She nodded, still standing with one foot half across the threshold, he only a little behind. As he looked over her shoulder he saw nothing but the sheer drop down, five hundred feet. A lightning-quick impulse seized him — a touch and she would be launched into eternity! He drew back, knowing, with a horrible certainty now, that if he stood there longer he must yield. But — he could not shake off the obsession. "If she wanders here alone and after dark — shall I not secretly come home some time under cover of the night — that would be safe — no one would ever know but that she slipped and fell. . ."

He walked across the flower carpet to the northern entrance, turned, and deliberately paced off the distance to where she stood still, motionless on the brink, but now facing him. Was she consciously tempting him, daring him? The great eyes were fixed on his face as though she read him like an open book. Whether it be true or not that speech is designed for the concealment of thought, this much is certain: where no speech is, to distract or falsify, a cer- certain order of thought-communication may be established, more certain, clear, and eloquent than any words in any of the tongues of men, the living or the dead. Alicia, with all her gentleness, had made it plain long before this that she understood her husband and de- spised him. To day she stood on the

threshold of the cliff, saying, without the clumsy medium of words, "You cannot terrify me. *But I can terrify you.*" Instinctively he made haste to wrap the cloak of words round the nakedness of his thought.

"I wish you wouldn't stand so near the edge. Are you not afraid?"

She shook her head.

"Fear itself is afraid of Alicia!" he thought, with an inward shudder. But he began half-consciously to shape his plans.

He must learn more about these nocturnal ramblings. He must not trust to chance.

That night as he hung above her in the darkness it seemed to him that she was more restless than before. Once something like a sob shook the delicate

body, and twice she moaned like some disembodied spirit struggling with a grief not human. Out of her rambling words Bellucci caught, now and then, sentences that seemed to have a ghostly dream-land sequence, but no rational meaning.

"I must not think. I must go out and forget — yes — yes. I'll go to the wells. I'll make fast my heart to a long, long chain.

"Oh— h! — not long enough, not long enough.

"Go home. You have many skeins of silk at home in the tower.

"Yes — now — knot the beautiful colors fast together, and wind them in a ball. There, there! I have yards on yards on yards. It must reach the bottom now. 'sh! Make the heart fast The poor heart trembles, full of prayers.

'sh! Make it fast. *Now!* It slips into the water, and drops all night long into blackness. How deep it goes! Oh, but I'm tired and cold; and my heart is heavy—heavy, heavy, and the silk string far from strong. Oh — h — my heart is heavy, down there in the dark. 'sh! I must leave it. I'll fasten the end of the silk about a stone. Hush! Hush!"

Was she elaborating her foolish game of dangling the gold trinket out of the castle window? Or — a light broke! — *out of the door*, in the unfinished building opening on the cliff? No doubt — and the deep well was the Val Bregaglia, and she played her ghastly game leaning over the sheer castle rock. At all events, he would steal home some night and see.

VIII

THE next morning he rode away, telling Alicia that he might be gone a week. He returned the second night. Behind a great rock, in a larch wood that stretched away and upward on the right of the Maloja road, a mile and a half from Castellontano, he tethered his horse and went forward on foot. The night was dark and gusty, with now and then a glimpse of gibbous moon. The protracted fine weather was ending abruptly; the pinch of winter was in the air. Arrived in Maloja, as he expected, without encountering a soul, Bellucci wended his way cautiously, giving a wide berth to the Kursaal buildings, although they were shut up, and, he felt sure, deserted. The members of his own household were, to the best of his

knowledge, the sole remaining dwellers at that end of the lake.

Lights were flitting about in the castle. By a circuitous route, keeping clear of the road, he reached the abandoned building to the right of the castle. He made his way round to the side that was overlooked by the tower, and he crouched down, keeping as well as he was able out of the keen gusts of searching wind that tore so fiercely round the corner. Looking up, he could see Alicia's only untapestried windows, the two looking down Chiavenna way. For an hour and a half he crouchd there — long after all the lights were out, save those in the two south windows. And still he kept his watch, in spite of weariness and cold. At last the wind brought sharply the noise of the great door closing, and he

started up to listen. No sound of any one coming that way, not a footfall. Cautiously he made his way toward the castle, stopping at every step to listen.

Presently he started and crouched down, for just below him, from behind a boulder, appeared a wavering light. When cautiously he lifted up his head, the light had moved a little further down, shifting, uncertain. The white figure bearing it surely was a woman, surely was Alicia — but where was she going? What to do? He followed slowly over the roughest part of the trackless rock-piled slope that stretched from the castle to the Maloja road. Once or twice he slipped, and silently cursed his crazy errand. The distance was really nothing, but Bellucci's anxiety and vague horror of his journey's end

made it seem half a life-time of fearful sliding from rock to rock, of listening to his own heart-beats and watching the wraith-like woman and *ignis fatuus* that flickered on before.

Now she stopped. The lantern was set down, and sent up into the gusty night only a dim gold haze.

Bellucci, afraid to advance straight upon her, circled slowly round. From below her he could see that she strained and wrenched to move a flat piece of rock out of its slanting position. To his amazement she seemed to succeed. He crept nearer on noiseless feet till at last, by leaning forward, he could see a narrow, faintly-illuminated opening in the tumbled rock-masses just beyond, an opening through which Alicia was creeping with the lantern in her hand. He ventured

nearer, the wind piping such a wild lament, Bellucci felt that any slight noise he might chance to make would be indistinguishable. All sense of stiffness and of cold vanished. His blood ran fever-hot and every sense had grown preternaturally keen. Plainly he saw Alicia's white figure, with the lantern, creeping past a circular opening in the floor of the dim-lit cavern. The hole seemed like the ordinary mason-builded mouth of a well. From where he stood it was impossible to see the bottom. But now the lantern caught an answering gleam beyond! — a sheet of shifting light.

Before Bellucci's incredulous eyes the back of the little cavern widened out under the approaching lantern rays. He could see how the rock above sloped

down sharply like an attic roof, above a circular sheet of ink-black water. Beside this pool — Bellucci saw it must be at least six meters across — Alicia set the lantern down. Why was she crouching there?

He moved nearer to the narrow mouth of the cavern, till he could see that his wife had put down beside the lantern a ball of vari-colored silk and was loosening the great gold heart from the chain about her neck. She made the heart fast to the end of silk and, with eyes gleaming, rapidly told off loop on loop, as sailors coil their rope. Suddenly, with a deft motion, she cast the heart from her into the middle of the inky pool, and leaned to listen. Then, lifting up her head, she let out more line with a rapidity well-nigh frenzied. Again

she stopped. No sound! As she lifted up her head above the lantern, or dropped it to listen at the water's brink, grotesque shadows darted above the cavern and seemed to rush out at the narrow mouth — a never-ending horde, to leap about Bellucci with vague antics, menacing disaster. And still the white figure crouched by the pool.

"Damned witchcraft," muttered Bellucci, tightening his fingers.

Alicia turned and saw him.

With an impulse of blind fury against the incarnate enigma he leaped down into the cavern, flung his arms about her and threw her headlong into the pool.

As the waters closed over her in troubled gleams of black and gold, Bellucci heard a voice on the height above,

calling. Quick as thought he put his foot upon the lantern. As he turned with dazed haste to make his way out, avoiding the other open "trap" upon his left — he felt himself held fast. Ghostly little fingers caught at his flying feet. He struggled and almost fell. Ah, he remembered! "The witch has spread her silken net," — he freed himself from the clinging meshes. He groped about feverishly an instant, gathering up the snarled silk in his hands, and striking painfully against a loosened stone. With the soft tangle — like Alicia's hair — he fastened the tell-tale clue, Alicia's broken lantern to the stone, threw them both into the water and fled out of the unholy place, breathless, trembling.

The calling had continued at intervals. Stockau's voice! Bellucci was not

so dazed but what he realized that this time it came from below.

It seemed to be advancing straight in the direction where Bellucci stood, shaking in every limb and with but one perception left quite unobscured: mortal horror of the pit behind him. He struck blindly out in the direction of the Kursaal, hoping to reach it by a détour to the left, and counting on Stockau's moving up or down in the direction of the Alpine garden. He had not stumbled far when he heard a step and a gruff, "Who goes there?" only a few yards from him. Whether below, above, to the right or left, Bellucci was too dazed to know. But this much was clear: the risk of not answering, and then being discovered, was too great; he must brave it out. With an oath he said:

"Can't you hear? I've been shouting to you against the wind for full five minutes."

"It is true I grow a little deaf," the Austrian said, with a sound of relief in his rough accent. "But it was not *your* voice, Monsieur, I listened for; I thought you had gone for some days."

"No, I told Alicia I should return to-night even if I were late. My horse has cast a shoe and gone lame. I've left him below."

"But did you meet Madame?"

"My wife! Out at this hour?"

"Yes — or at least I heard the great door bang, and I thought when I looked out I saw a lantern gleam down here."

"How long ago?"

"Oh, as long as it takes an old man to shuffle into his clothes."

"It is quite impossible that my wife — but I don't understand in any case why *you* —"

"No, monsieur, you have not heard. We have made a great discovery. At least, I should say that Madame, your wife, has made a discovery. I know of it only to-day myself, and like Madame la Comtesse I am unable to sleep for thinking of it."

The black cloud masses had hurried past the misshapen moon, and in the momentary gleam Stockau stopped and peered about anxiously.

"I am glad if I was mistaken. For so well now do I realize how perilous this slope may be at night, that I would fain persuade Madame your wife to leave further investigation till the hours of daylight."

"She is, beyond a doubt, in bed, asleep."

"Monsieur forgets what I told him of her nightly rambles, when Monsieur is not at home. But I no longer blame her, nor so much as wonder. I understand the fascination of the place as even *I* never did before." The gruff old voice was trembling with excitement. "You have here upon the Castle Hill, under the rock detritus —"

"— a murdered woman scarce grown cold," Bellucci filled in silently the moment's pause.

"You have, Monsieur le Comte, marvelous, I had almost said incredible, evidence of the Wonder-working Age!"

"The Age of Witchcraft!" ejaculated Bellucci, more to himself than to his companion.

"You may well call so the Age of Ice. You are the possessor, sir, of two, at least, of the most perfect examples of glacial erosion known to science."

The jargon bewildered Bellucci's dazed wits.

"I do not understand these things," he said, making as if to hurry on.

"A child can understand; for *there*" — Stockau laid a detaining hand on his host's arm and pointed back — back to where Alicia lay under the rock and under the water — "you have, down there, the object lesson, the proof —"

"Proof," repeated Bellucci, blindly.

"Aye! *Proof* of the drama that has been enacted on the Castle Hill!"

Bellucci stood still. He thought he should have fallen — or rather he had

distinctly the sensation of actual dropping through a dizzy void.

"Strange, strange," the old man repeated, still with unwonted excitement, "that one who watches as devoutly as I do the varied aspects of Nature — that I should for years have studied this morain zone, should have read the deep-graved glacier runes scoring the castle rock — that I should in my poor way have scratched for years in the light humus of the Alpine garden, and never dreamed of what lay underneath."

"Underneath?" repeated Bellucci, vaguely. "Why should there be anything underneath?"

"It remained for Madame la Comtesse to show us the two stupendous *Glacier Meules* that have been ground out of Castellontano rock through the

long Arctic nights and fierce short summers of the glacial era."

"The deep, deep wells!" came back to Bellucci like an echo from another world.

"You have heard, perhaps," said the savant eagerly, "as you have walked over a glacier, a deep rumbling underfoot, as of subterranean thunder?"

"No, I have no experience of glaciers."

"Ah, I forgot. But that sound I speak of is the melted ice rushing fiercely into the shaft of a Glacier Mill. If the water finds at the bottom a loose boulder — hugged up by the glacier, and carried maybe for miles — the terrific force of the falling water dashes the boulder round and round in its prison, till it hollows out a basin for itself in the solid rock. A basin first, and, as the

ages pass, the glacier millstones hollow out vast pits. There are two of them down there."

"— and in one a murdered woman," Bellucci's thought pieced out. He seemed, curiously, to have lost his sense of volition — a partial numbness had fallen upon him. His brain went on beating out the same thing and his feet moved slowly, heavily, like the feet of the very old. He had no longer any wish or any power to shake off his companion.

"To think of this visible and striking testimony to the great geologic drama, at our very door! One of the vast stone caldrons has a crack in the side, and is nearly empty save of its two polished grinders, and some rubbish. The other," he drew a quicker breath, "ah, the in-

terest, the absorbing, electrifying interest of these things!" he exclaimed half to himself, adding to his host, "The other pit is full of water, and we do not yet know how deep the centuries have worn it. No wonder Madame la Comtesse is so wrought upon, open as she is to the great influences of mountain, rock, and chasm."

With a vague sense of cynical amusement, Bellucci realized that the discovery had had the same effect upon the savant as it had upon Alicia. It melted the snows of their silence and marked with both the end of the Reign of Ice.

"No other woman," the old man said with something like enthusiasm, "no other woman, I do verily believe, has ever been before so responsive to the

majesty of these great forces — of," his voice sank reverently, "of the gigantic forces that make the best things man has done seem child's play. *Man!* Who that has come near to inanimate Nature in her great moods of poetry and power, who can thereafter think of men save as of ants — swarming over their little perishable earth-built kingdoms, bearing their food or their dead — a travesty on human importance!"

They had reached the castle now, and stood under one of the tunnel-like arches.

"If you find that I was right, Monsieur — if Madame your wife has gone abroad to look again before she sleeps into one of the most curious chapters of all Nature's strange story — do not be surprised, Monsieur le Comte, do

not, above all, be angered. Small wonder if she cannot wait till day, as she as good as promised me."

"She promised you."

"Yes, she has the true spirit, receptive, indomitable, but patient —"

"You say she promised you? She *spoke* to you!"

"Yes, *mon Dieu!* Why not?"

"To be sure, why not?" There was silence for a moment under the arches. Then, with his old stiffness, "Good night!" said the Austrian.

"One moment. You said if she could wait till day — what did you mean to do when day comes?"

"Sound the great Glacier Mill, of course!"

"What for?"

"Why, to ascertain the depth."

"Ah! to see what there is at the bottom!"

"Yes," said the old man with the accent of one preoccupied who answers the questioning of a child.

"What should be there?" Bellucci persisted.

"Millstones, one or more, and —"

"Yes?"

"We will sound it first and then we will empty it."

"*I forbid you!*" At the almost frenzied resonance of the sudden cry in that place of hollow echoes, the old man started back and leaned a hand against the wall.

"You — you cannot mean to prevent —"

"I *do* mean that if you owe anything to the roof that has so long sheltered

you — go secretly and close up the mouth of that witches' cavern. I adjure you by my father's memory — let no one ever know —"

"But —" the old man was trying to recover himself — "in the interests of knowledge —"

"The Gletscher Mühle belong to me!" I will not have them touched. I tell you the mills are mine."

"They are the Mills of the Gods, Monsieur. Have no fear, I shall not abuse your hospitality, though I have done with it." He walked away a few steps in the darkness, stopped and called back, "Understand, as well as a mind like yours is able — that I make great sacrifice to you of the interests of science. There is much still to find out about the laws of glacial erosion — why

their movement is like man's, like the course of Empire, always and unerringly from east to west. Ah," cried the old voice, "*you* do not understand, but Madame la Comtesse could tell you" — he groped a few paces back to where Bellucci stood — "Madame la Comtesse could tell you that the inside of these —"

Bellucci's wild laughter stopped him.

"You think my wife could tell tales of the inside of your hell-pots? Answer me, Sir Scientist, did it never occur to you that she was mad?"

"No, Monsieur."

"But very strange, eh, Sir Scientist?"

"Strangely beautiful and strangely sad." The old man went within.

A few minutes later Bellucci stood at the door of the great roofless building where Alicia had lingered unafraid. He

stared up at the rolling cloud-masses till it seemed to him, standing there on Castellontano rock, that he could feel the motion of the whirling world. Rooted, scarcely daring to draw breath in his sudden access of faintness, Bellucci turned his eyes instinctively for light and reassurement to the moon. But the clouds had half obscured it — the clouds — God! What pattern were they weaving over there? In shaded waves of moonlight and of shadow, the vast design moved giddily across the moon. Had he sent Alicia hence only that she might hang her tapestries along the walls of heaven? He shut out the sight. Would he come to fear the lifting of his eyelids, lest he should see by sunlight or by moonlight patterned across the sky this design to turn men's brains?

As he stood there he fell into trembling, for albeit his eyes were closed he saw the vision still — only clearer, with more color and more motion — as he had seen it in Alicia's arras when it seemed to rock the tower — as he had seen it through many an hour of the night, painted on the dark. And it came to him that Alicia had wrought that pattern of Bewilderment upon the tissue of his brain. Oh, to blot it out — to blot it out!

He opened his eyes and saw that the world still reeled and staggered before that ensign in the heavens, fluttering in ghostly fashion before the shamed face of the misshapen moon. For one sick instant his eyes turned away and plunged into the soft gloom of the Val Bregaglia, searching in a dazed despair for that

haven where no light shines and wavers, mocks and beckons.

A meteor shot down — the darkness drank it up.

"*There*, down there light is conquered — light is quenched," whispered Bellucci. "That is my pathway, too." And he stepped out of the wind-swept court into midair.

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